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EDITORIAL

THE plebiscite of our churches and fellowships is now behind us and the Merger Commission has made its initial report. As we approach the eve of the meetings of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America when final action by the two delegate bodies will be taken in the matter of Consolidation some reflections may be in order. Clearly the large majority of our Unitarian churches and fellowships recorded themselves as favoring consolidation with the Universalist Church of America. There are, to be sure, many ways of reading the figures released by the Joint Merger Commission. We may, if we wish, complain that something has happened to our democratic sensitivities when a church of 1700 members and a fellowship of 10 members were assigned equal voting strength in the plebiscite. But those were, after all, the rules that the delegates of both denominations adopted in the mood of unquestioning acceptance of Merger Commission proposals coupled with persuasion from merger enthusiasts whose arguments were distinguished by a lack of reasonableness, wanting in evidence of any serious reflection whatever, and an emotionalism which could bring color to the cheek of the most unrepentant fundamentalist.

The Merger Commission does not tell us what proportion of the potential vote of the membership of individual units expressed its feeling about merger. But there again, we accepted the rules with scarcely an audible utterance of any kind, so we cannot lay any charge at the door of the Merger Commission, save the possibility that what they have described as overwhelming approval may have borne more of the earmarks of a Massachusetts primary! Be that as it may the plebiscite is now behind us.

The delegates at the annual meeting this month must decide whether they will take the final step and vote the American Unitarian Association out of existence thus ending a 135 years history that has had its great moments in abundance, if there have been some moments when it was less than its best. But then, what organization of individuals and churches can claim more? If the Universalist delegates take similar action at their meetings to end the independant existence of the Universalist Church of America we are then finally committed to the consolidation of the two denominations.

Perhaps it is not amiss to read again some of the words of William Lawrence Sullivan written nearly thirty years ago. He was addressing himself to the proposed Constitution of the Free Church of America—the last ill-fated attempt to unite Unitarians and Universalists. The circumstances are different as the times are different. Dr. Sullivan supported the Free Church of America effort, but his criticism of its Constitution may contain some timely thoughts for us on the eve of consolidation.

> ". . . The Preamble also says that if we try to serve mankind "differing statements of faith may enrich our common life." This means, it appears, that if only we are homogeneous in the matter of serving mankind we may be indefinitely heterogeneous in statements of faith, and that the heterogeneousness will or may enrich us. This is a proposition which, I am sure, is quite untenable. Differing statements of faith enrich a fellowship only when they are variations and fresh interpretations of the central principle of the fellowship, new lights upon it, a clearer vision of it, deeper deductions from it. Then they enrich because there is a structural principle capable of being enriched. But it is disastrous, intellectually and spiritually, to heap up heterogenous

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The Ideal Unitarian Church

Robert W. Haney

To ask a Unitarian to discuss his Doctrine of the Church is somewhat like suggesting to a politician that he present his views on universal adult suffrage. In such circumstances both the Unitarian and the politician are called upon to become self-conscious, to probe the roots of their beliefs for an answer. Neither is accustomed to thinking in such terms, and both the Unitarian and the politician are as likely to be surprised at their answers as their critics are apt to be condescending in their objections.

When I was first asked to present my Doctrine of the Church – and up to that moment I did not even know that I had one – I began to try to recollect some passage which would adequately express my particular understanding of what a church is all about. I thought almost at once of a short story by that accomplished Danish writer, Isak Dinesen and of one very important bit of dialogue.

Cardinal Salviati, the narrator of the tale, has just encountered a lady who has come to him as a penitent.

"'Men and women,' the Cardinal went on, 'in the course of time have come to me and have asked my advice. Many of them have come in deep distress . . .'

"'As I myself!' she exclaimed.

"'In deep distress and anguish,' he continued, 'which, however, have never been deeper than my compassion with each of them – and have put their problems before me in all kinds of terms. Madame, the multitude of statements and arguments have been but so many variations of one single cry of the heart, of one single question: "Who am I?" If I could but answer that question, if I could but solve that riddle for them, my consultants would be saved.'"[1]

A church should be, it seems to me, the one institution in a community which is interested, qualified, and daring enough to try to give some kind of answer to the question which haunts the mind of every human being at the moment when he looks beyond his preoccupation with his immediate existence, the question of "Who am I?" In one sentence, my Doctrine of the Church is this: the church is that fellowship of men and women which attempts to solve the problem of meaning as that problem manifests itself in every aspect of life.

Let's look at this definition for a minute or two. The word "fellowship" implies several things. It implies, first of all, a community of interest and concern. Ideally, a church consists of those men and women who have come to believe that the problem of meaning cannot be answered fully by any other group, cannot be solved in a comprehensive way with the materials obtainable from any other source. This is, to be sure, a teleological rather than a phenomenological definition. Its primary focus is upon the purpose of the fellowship rather than the forms in which the fellowship is expressed. One might think in this regard of Tillich's magnificent metaphor of religion looking for a home in first the moral, then the cognitive, the aesthetic, and finally in the affective functions of the human spirit. Finding itself in danger of being swallowed by one or another of these functions, "religion," Tillich writes, "suddenly realizes that it does not need such a place, that it does not need to seek for a home. It is at home everywhere, namely in the depth of all functions of man's spiritual life."[2]

Love is the Bond

The person who is truly concerned with the problem of meaning will discover what religion in Tillich's metaphor discovers: namely, that while every aspect of human society, every prompting of an individual's own nature, and every observation that he makes of the external world contribute something to an answer to the question of meaning, they never contribute enough. Their suggestions are always partial, though these suggestions are often presented in such a way as to imply that there can be no other useful suggestions. Philosophical skepticism, psychological reductionism, and the social cults of race, nation, or class are cases in point.

Ideally, then, a church is a fellowship of the reapers of the answers growing out of the ex-

[1] Isak Dinesen, *Last Tales* (N.Y., Random House, 1957), pp. 3-4.
[2] Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (N.Y., Oxford, 1959), pp. 6-7.

periences planted and nourished outside the church's doors. These reapers, among whom the minister, too, must be counted, remove the husks from these answers, these experiences which have been important in their own lives and in the lives of others, and attempt to make from the valuable grain thus acquired the bread wherewith to satisfy the gnawing desire within them, the desire to know "Who I am." We have, then, a fellowship with a common concern and a common activity. Something more is needed, however. Something more is suggested by the word "fellowship." I am speaking here of sympathy, or empathy, or, in preference to these two awkward words, of love. Love is the bond which holds a church together. In contrast to some philosophers I would suggest that there is no logical necessity arising out of the common quest or out of the shared experiences of the fellowship for love to appear and to do its work. More than anything else, love depends upon the quality of the persons who belong to the church. It depends upon whether or not they know how to love in such a situation. But, to be sure, such considerations bring us dangerously close to the question of what the church is rather than what the church ought to be.

Much has been said thus far about experiences garnered from outside and used by the fellowship. These experiences will be of value in deepening thought, in elaborating or simplifying worship, and in tightening the bonds which unite them one with another. This is a good point to emphasize the importance of worship as a part of the teleological orientation of the church. It seems to me that the attitudes of reverence, awe, and thankfulness which are at the core of worship constitute part of the foundation out of which springs the question "Who am I?" Worship is, thus, an integral part of the process of answering that question.

We must extend this brief treatment of worship, however, to ask if all valuable experience must come from outside the church. Is the church largely the threshing room of other people's grain? I think not. The church has its own contribution to make, a contribution which is hard to define. In brief we may say that out of the concern and the activity of the fellowship, out of the patient quest for meaning in which all are engaged, there emerge new insights, new powers, new relations which are distinctive, which surely could be found elsewhere were not life outside the church so overburdened by social frills and fripperies that these "new" elements never have a chance to come to the surface. If someone were to suggest in this regard that the church is a vehicle of grace I would not object, so long as it was understood that any human being or institution can be a vehicle of grace and that the church's service depends upon its keeping close to the roots of experience and concern. When it becomes as superficial as the Rotary or the DAR it loses its distinctive powers and is just another social group, interested largely in self-perpetuation.

The Problem of Meaning

A word or two is long overdue to explain what is meant by the problem of meaning. Part of my intent was made clear by the reference to Tillich's metaphor and the discussion which followed, but the most important aspects of the term have yet to be treated.

By the problem of meaning I do not refer merely to the question of psychological self-definition. This aspect of the problem of meaning is present to some small degree, but ideally the adult church member knows who he is as an individual. He knows about his relations to other people, his abilities, his deficiencies, etc.

If he is a lawyer he may have decided that the meaning of his personal life is the ordering of social relations. If he is a teacher he may find meaning in the transmission of facts, ideas, and techniques. But the problem of meaning, the "Who am I?" which concerns the church has a broader perspective. It involves such questions as, what are the values of social existence, what is the significance of human personality, of human freedom? Supremely, it involves the question, what is the meaning of the life of an individual, of a generation, of mankind in terms of the cosmos? This, of course, gives to the church a philosophical-theological function. In this regard, we might make the following distinctions. Other factors in an individual's life provide the data with which he can work on a day-to-day basis, plus a few one-sided interpretations. The church, ideally, unites the data into a general picture of the human situation and then seeks to suggest the meaning of it all. The church can fulfil this very important function if, ideally, it deliberately tries to free itself from everything which would encumber it in its work.

T. S. Eliot was not talking about the church

when he wrote these lines in "Burnt Norton," but they can be read as descriptive of the church and of its work.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity.
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,
Neither ascent nor decline.[3]

What the Church Should Be

In looking at the implications of this understanding of the church for specific facets of our twentieth century life I would suggest the following points. First, the church must be concerned with any endeavor that will contribute something to the church's understanding of man and the cosmos. Unitarians usually say that all the facts about man and his world are not yet available. Thus, we are obliged to be hospitable to whatever data are produced either by the natural sciences, the behavioral sciences, the social sciences, or the arts.

Secondly, a Unitarian church ought to look with warm regard to all endeavors whose concerns parallel its own. I do not think that an habitual contempt for any expression of religious concern is befitting a church. To the degree that other churches make themselves ultimate and their original purposes secondary, to the degree that the problem of meaning is stripped of its importance and made subsidiary to a particular theological statement or to an ecclesiastical structure, to that degree is another church open to criticism. However, a Unitarian church must be willing to accept criticism when it falls short in the same way.

In discussing what the definition of a church which I have suggested means a number of implications were somewhat obliquely touched upon. I would here give one of them a little more attention. The church should, with regard to its own members, stress two aspects of its life. On the one hand, it should stress a sense of its own distinctiveness, its own potential freedom from any process which would turn the church into an idol and its *raison d'etre,* the problem of meaning, into its chief worshipper. The church is an organization with a mission, and that mission must transcend every historic form which men can devise. On the other hand, the church must stress the activity which the church's purpose implies, the earnest searching for an answer to the problem of meaning. These two emphases are of vital importance. It is, however, the misfortune of the church that they stand in opposition to each other. The quest for a *solution,* the goal of all human activity, opposes the quest for *meaning itself,* which seems to elude solutions. The solutions usually have to distort the problem of meaning in order to boast that they are solutions, and, conversely, the problem of meaning is so great as seemingly to discourage the quest for solutions. This tension exists not merely at the level of the church's dealings with its members but also at the level of the church's dealings with everything and everybody else. Do we not find ourselves confronted here with the old problem of priest and prophet? Until the problem of meaning is solved, the conflict will remain. The severest challenge to the stamina of churches and ministers is the very real possibility that in human history there can be no final solution to the problem, no easing of tensions. It is surely part of the genius of the writer of the Book of Revelation that the problem was seen as being answered only in an eschatological way:

> And I saw a new heaven and a new earth. . . And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. . .
>
> And I saw no temple therein. . . .[4]

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[3] T. S. Eliot, "Burnt Norton," in *Collected Poems,* 1909-1935 (N.Y., Harcourt, Brace, 1936), p. 215.
[4] Revelation 21:1a, 2, 22a.

Albert Camus: Apostle of Paradox

Victor H. Carpenter, Jr.

Early in 1960, Albert Camus was killed in an automobile accident. The tragic circumstances of his death serve to underscore the paradox which haunted and motivated his work and life; the paradox with which he struggled both as an artist and as a person, but which he failed to resolve by the time of his passing. How does a man, even such a gifted man as Camus, reconcile what appears to be a stubborn and unyielding belief in the ultimate value of human creativity with an equally unflinching recognition that the universe which houses that creativity is senselessly perverse? Camus was not able to answer this question. If he had lived out his life, if the brilliant career to which he was committed had flowered in normal course, it is possible that a resolution might have been forthcoming. But Albert Camus—novelist, essayist, dramatist; creative genius of Twentieth Century French letters; recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature—died at the age of forty-seven when the automobile in which he happened to be riding struck a tree. A paradoxical end to a life devoted to spelling out the paradoxical relationship between human creativity and cosmic absurdity.

Camus' failure to reconcile the conflict motifs does not detract from his greatness either as an artist or as an intellect. The literary and philosophic value of his work lies not in offering a solution to the paradox, but rather in its brilliant delineation of the character of the paradox itself. "Do you know", he wrote in 1953, "that over the period of twenty-five years (between 1922 and 1947) seventy million Europeans, men, women and children have been uprooted, deported and killed?" Human creativity ("seventy million Europeans") vs. cosmic absurdity ("uprooted, deported and killed"); this is the conflict so demandingly presented by Camus. To be touched by his demand ("Do YOU know") is to be drawn into the conflict.

In presenting his conception of the paradox, Camus utilizes two symbols: the sun and death. However, the reality to which these symbols point is often obscure and confusing to the reader because of the ambiguous relationship of the symbols to each other. The sun constantly beams down upon humanity, but more than the nourisher of creation, its light is impitiable, unblinking, scorching as Truth. The sun represents cosmic truth, Camus' symbol of disinterested creation and destruction. It points to the idea of trans-logical light, illuminating the meaningful and the meaningless without reason or mercy. Death, for Camus, is the symbol of cosmic purposelessness against which human creativity must struggle to assert itself if it is to gain its ultimate meaning. Death points to ultimate human powerlessness in the face of which creativity expresses its ultimate power.

Man Must Shed His Illusions

Camus uses his symbols as weapons in a personal war against the illusions which he sees as enslaving mankind. In the light of truth and in the face of death a man must finally reject his illusions. Baseless hopes cannot withstand either the truth of the sun or the reality of death. Because he is created both to truth and to death, man must shed his illusions which would pervert his inherent honesty and goodness. An illustration of this theme is found in the figure of Father Paneloux as he appears in Camus' novel *The Plague.* When the plague first strikes the town of Oran, this priest is confident that it is a Divine judgement upon man's sins. The plague is a punishment which the Almighty has visited upon the wicked and a discipline by which He intends to test the righteous. However, as the plague takes over all life in Oran, Father Paneloux comes apart at the theological seams. Finally, having given himself over to the care of the diseased and dying, he himself falls ill and dies. Does the priest die in the odor of sanctity? Does he die full of faith and looking forward to the general resurrection of the dead? No one knows. In fact, no one can say for sure whether or not Father Paneloux even died in the plague. The priest is entered in the records as "a doubtful case".

Father Paneloux is never engaged in theological debate. At no point in the narrative is he scorned or ridiculed because he is a Christian. After all, such argumentation would be elevat-

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Liberal Religious Education

Elizabeth Baker

In order to clarify issues in education, it is necessary to separate the methods of education from the final aims or goals. Although the methods and objectives are related and the one effects the other, method and objective are not identical. So too, in order to consider the issues in religious education it is necessary to make a distinction between the process of becoming religious and the theology or philosophy of the mature religion which is our goal.

To help us make such distinction, I would like to draw an analogy between religious education and mountain climbing.

There is one thing that all mountain climbers have in common: Their objective is to reach the top; their goal is "up". But it makes considerable difference whether the mountain they hope to climb is Mt. Defiance, a soft, friendly mountain in New York, or the Matterhorn in Switzerland. In religious education, we share certain objectives with all religions—but as members of a liberal church we have a particular mountain top in view. But even if we are agreed upon the mountain we wish to climb, we are confused by the behavior of persons who are at a distance from us, but who are theoretically trying to get to the same place. They do not come in a straight line from the foot of the mountain to the top. They go to the right or to the left. Sometimes they appear to have forgotten their objective completely and start down the mountain again. If we know the terrain well, however, we realize they go to the right or to the left to get around a cliff and they may descend the mountain a little way to find a place to cross a stream. The direction climbers take depends upon the topography of the land. So, too, in religious education the direction we take depends not only on the objective we wish to attain, but also upon the lay of the land—the nature of how children grow to become religious adults. If we were to observe mountain climbers further, we would notice that each climber has a different length of stride, a different premise as to the very best way to climb the very same mountain. So, too, each of us has preconceived notions and patterns of action which also determine how we go about our task.

Goal—Method—Assumptions

First, I would like to consider with you the goals we share—the mountain peak we wish to reach. Where are we going? Next, we will discuss the topography or the way in which children become religious. Last, I will share with you some of the assumptions which have shaped the pattern of our teaching.

First—the direction we go—UP. The aim of all religious education is to produce a person who has religion. What, then, is religion? Religion is that integration which gives meaning to all environment. I mean emotional and rational response as well as behavior. Religion arises out of experience and in turn enriches and changes and directs experience. Religion is man's audacious bid to understand and make whole the isolated segments of his universe and his life.

All persons do not achieve this integration. Many who do find it, find different sources of the meaning of life. To one person, the salvation of his soul in eternity may give meaning and direction to all of life. Another may find his source of integration in the search for truth and veneration of truth. Still another may find his meaning in the nature, dignity, and stature of men, or in a cause, such as serving man. While to an oriental mystic, the negation of all that we consider goes into making a man, may be the ultimate meaning of life. Negation of life, affirmation of life, this world centered, other world centered—religions vary—but the unification of all areas of life into a meaningful whole is the goal of all religions. In this, we are like the mountain climbers, who no matter where they are, what language they speak, all seek the top—all share the direction "UP".

Liberalism's Particular Goal

But liberal religion is a specific peak among the mountains of religious aspiration. What, then, distinguishes liberal religion and its particular goal and direction?

Fundamental to liberal religion is the belief that man has infinite potential—that each individual is unique and of supreme worth. The naive faith in the complete goodness and rational nature of this infinite potential has been sharply

challenged, and today our belief in man's progress upward and onward forever is tempered by recognition of the destructive forces within man and within his environment. We have a clearer perception of the influence of biological and emotional factors on rational behavior. We have more humility in recognition of man's dependence upon factors beyond his control—that he does not create himself, nor live in and of himself, but as a part of that which is outside himself. However, we still hold to our faith in the supreme value of every individual. Arising out of this basic faith come the necessary corrolaries of our belief in the value of freedom and our belief that the personal sovereignty of each individual must be matched by his personal responsibility. To equip a child for autonomous or self-directed growth within this frame of reference, and thus toward freedom and responsibility becomes one of our aims.

The second distinctive feature of liberal religion is the conviction that the good, the true, the beautiful are not yet perceived. Therefore, the techniques for discovering truth, good, and beauty become important in our religion and our religious education. To put this most simply, whereas many religions believe they have the answer and their religious education then becomes the teaching or sharing of these answers, neatly packaged in the creed or dogma, we share or teach, *not the answers* but ways of finding answers. We share what we believe to be the best of our insights and the insights and values of the past—not as the final truth but as instruments for finding better answers and for judging among possible answers. In doing this, we recognize that the certainty of a final answer is denied.

The sharp distinctions of our mountain top then are found in our view of man as infinite potential and in our view of truth as not yet completely attained or finally revealed.

Since we share with many others a common origin in Judaism modified by Greek and Christain thought, the specific characteristics of our mountain may be more sharply focused if we contrast separate parts of it with similar parts of other mountains in the same range. The contrast will be so sketchy as to be almost inaccurate, but it may serve to sharpen our picture of liberal religion.

The nature of God, or ultimate reality:

For the orthodox God is supernatural, in the sense that though natural law is a part of the total plan of God, God is not bound within such law. God is discoverable through revelation as found in the Bible, Jesus, the canon and dogma of the church. Man may discover God through or within his own experience, but whenever his experience comes into conflict with truth already revealed, his experience must give way to authority.

For the liberal, God or Ultimate Reality is within the natural order, discoverable in large part through reason and intuition—a reality which even children can experience in their contact with the wonders of life, the heights of human love and devotion.

Faith

For the orthodox acceptance of beliefs is the means to salvation and union with the eternal and God.

For the liberal exploring and questioning is the pathway to the greater understanding by which man is united with that which is timeless and ultimate.

Jesus

For the orthodox Christian, Jesus is central to human destiny—only through knowing and believing in Him as more than man, as the Son of God, can man begin to know God and be saved.

For the liberal, Jesus is one of the great teachers and prophets of the past. He is especially important in our culture because he has come to represent man's highest idealization of human personality and the enduring value of personal influence.

The Bible

For the orthodox, the Bible is divine authority and reveals God and God's will to man.

For the liberal, the Bible is the record of a people's growing and changing concept of the divine. This record is closely tied to our whole cultural and value inheritance. However, since it is but one of the many records of idealism, ethics, and religious insight, all secular and religious history which enters human values can become a source of religious knowledge.

Moral Values

For the orthodox, moral values are prescribed by creed and rule. (I believe it was this morality Jesus opposed in ancient times.)

For the liberal, moral values are those which answer human needs. As such, our moral values

become pluralistic and tentative, rather than absolute.

I realize that in what I have been saying, I have gone way out on a limb. For one thing, we are not used to speaking in theological terms and most frequently we discuss our religion in the words and terminology of philosophy, or psychology or the social sciences. For another thing, the contrast between orthodoxy and liberalism is neither as sharp or as simple as I have made it. Additionally, I am sure I have said some things that you disagree with, for all of us have adopted different modifications of the theology out of which our church emerged. On top of all this, my own training in the discipline of theology is not as rigorous as I would wish.

Even though my description of our mountain is limited, I hope it has served to sharpen our awareness of the kind of mountain top we wish to reach. For me, liberal religion is a summit which attracts those who wish to add ever increasing dimension to the meaning of life, those who cherish the infinite value of every personality, those who guard the freedom which allows for variation, those who make commitment to the highest human values, even while knowing that these values may not be the ultimate answer.

You will recall that I said that even though we are agreed upon the mountain peak we would climb, we would be confused by the procedures by which people attempt to make the climb. However, the apparent loss of direction by those who go to the right or the left to avoid a cliff, or even descend away to ford a stream was dictated by the topography of the land. So too, the way we reach our objectives is dictated by the way in which people grow to be religious, or the way they learn.

Learning Process and Religious Growth

Let us discuss briefly, now, the lay of the land, i.e., the nature of the learning process as it influences religious growth.

For the sake of convenience, we will divide all of life experience into areas. Of course, we recognize that there can be other divisions and that no area is completely isolated but rather all areas merge and separate. Let us draw lines like the spokes of a wheel to make arbitrary divisions: One area we will call experience with people, another nature, another manipulation of environment, another past experience of the race or history, another creative (and here we include mental activity as well as the usual art forms, another the self.) You will notice that there is no separate area designated religious. This is because religion is that which binds all these other areas together. It arises out of these experiences and returns to enrich and direct them. Here in the center is the child. As he matures, he will explore wider and wider segments of these various areas of life. Manipulation of environment – he learns to hold the bottle, to make the wanted sound to indicate desired object, etc. Nature—he learns a caterpillar or "pretty birdie". As he grows older, he learns about grandmother, and perhaps experiences his first history—when grandma was a little girl. When a child first enters church school, he has a pretty large assortment of experience in these various areas. What then is the function of the church school? For, I assume we are especially concerned with the contribution of the church school in helping a child develop the meaning of his totality of experience. In the first place, the church school has a fairly negligible proportion of time to make an effect on education. Therefore, the school builds upon the experience the child has had, helps him to reflect, evaluate and fit it into a meaningful whole. Let us just trace the curriculum of most of our schools, and see how it does this:

Martin and Judy is an example of this attempt to help children find the real, deep meaning in experience they have already had or could have. Martin learns he can find his nickel by himself, he considers the stars above and the deep questions he feels; he learns about grandfather, he learns about himself, his fears—his strengths. *The Family Finds Out* carries children further as they think about the robin that couldn't fly and the kitty who was killed. *The Gift of Life* brings children face to face with the eternal mystery of birth and growth. By the time a child has a sense of time, we tend to move into a more circumscribed area in that we deal quite a bit with the past experience of man in his search for religious insight: *Joseph, Beginnings, Moses, Jesus the Carpenter's Son, The Old Story of Salvation, The Drama of Ancient Israel, The Church Across the Street, Men of Prophetic Fire, Abraham,* etc.

However, we deal in this area, not to transmit the answers, as final truth, but to give children an opportunity to search for their own answers, and to feel a part of all those who have sought to find meaning in life; and also to give children

knowledge and concepts to help them in this search.

Through our worship, our projects, our personal influence, we seek always to present additional experiences within the child's range of understanding, to use our knowledge of the ways in which he learns, to reinforce the reflective insights he may discover so that at every stage in his development, his total experience has meaning and his life has direction. At the same time, we attempt to continually widen his horizon and give increased depth to his religious conviction so that it may always be dynamic rather than static, bringing into focus more and more of life.

We may well wish we could give the child our mature concepts, but he will accept only what he is mature enough to grasp, he will find meaning only when it is rooted in his own experience.

This is the topography which determines the way we climb with our children.

In conclusion, I would like to present briefly the basic premises which determine for me the best way of climbing our specific mountain.

Capacity to be a Liberal

First of all, I believe that learning as a change in behavior as the results of experience (and I use behavior and experience in their broadest sense), and that the capacity for liberal religion can be taught – but certain kinds of experience are necessary for this learning–

1. A part of the capacity to be a religious liberal comes out of the same kinds of experience that are necessary to learn any discipline or course of study. This aspect of religious education includes:

   1. Learning the technique of inquiry–or how to find answers.
   2. Developing the capacity for creative thinking.
   3. Learning to recognize the role of personal bliss in the interpretation of evidence.
   4. And difficult indeed in the time we have at our disposal, mastering the knowledge necessary for evaluation, which means the facts of our religious heritage, the climate of present thought. In other words, we must teach knowledge–for religion is not like Topsy–it doesn't just grow out of a vacuum.

2. A part of the capacity to be a religious liberal comes out of the effective or emotional learnings and certain kinds of experience and reflection about these experiences lead to the development of the attitudes of religion. Among these attitudes are the feeling of universal belonging. We can present experiences which will help children feel that they are a part of the whole cosmic reality–contributing to and encompassed within the universe which is their home. We can present experiences from which they may become aware that they are not only in and of the present–but they are a part of the great stream of humanity–the seekers of yesterday, the companions of today, and those who will come after them. Through such orientation in the great pattern of life they will find increased meaning in life.

3. A part of the capacity to be a religious liberal is discrimination in values. This kind of learning we know little about. We do know that a warm and accepting atmosphere with reinforcement by praise for certain value-choices, and the verbal discrimination between different values accompanied by explanation has some influence on this. We believe that values depend largely upon the total context in which they are taught. Therefore, by presenting certain experiences for value discrimination in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, children may form attachment to the better and the good.

4. And lastly, because the institution is important to me, I try to give our children the kinds of experiences by which they learn to love first their local church and the people in it, next their denomination–its history and what it stands for–and finally place among their values the desire to serve and shape a pioneering, open-ended church.

To participate in the climb to our mountain top, whether or not the premises on which I start my climb are the same as yours, is for me the most exciting educational venture I can imagine.

From The President's Desk

A short time before the Second World War a controversy arose in England over the question: "Are Unitarians Christians?" A noted Unitarian, Dr. L. P. Jacks, who was editor of a famous theological journal and Principal of Manchester College, Oxford was first invited and then refused permission to speak at Liverpool Cathedral. The Dean of the cathedral apologized to Dr. Jacks that the Bishop had made such strict rulings that Unitarians were excluded from participation in any kind of service. Dr. Jack's reply is notable and is worth pondering today for he pointed out: "Unless the churches of Christendom are able to transcend their institutional selfishness, their corporal self-seeking and unchristian relations among themselves, learning to help rather than to hinder one another, and bear one another's burdens instead of increasing them, unless that is, they are willing to put religion before church policy, the days of organized Christianity are almost certainly numbered." And, Dr. Jacks added: "sweeping excommunication of knowledge, science, philosophy and human culture in general" is no longer acceptable to those who think, and he reminded us that "we are living in an age when every thinking man knows we are not governed by the creed of Nicea".

Why then should the churches insist that only those who accept the Nicean creed or the Apostles creed, or have at least a trinitarian concept of God are Christians?

Jesus said, very simply, "follow me!" Another time he said: "You are my disciples if you do whatsoever I command you." When asked by what sign his disciples should be distinguished, he said: "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, that you love one another." But most churches still insist on some creed, ceremony or confirmation, as prerequisite to becoming a Christian. Yet, the world knows what is generally accepted as the meaning of the word "Christian". Of a very good man it is frequently said: "He is a good Christian". Why? Because he believes in God, he is a good neighbor, and he is ready to share with those in need! Of some specific act of kindness, it is said: "That was a good Christian attitude." Why? Because the person spoken of was tolerant and kindly in a difficult situation. How often the word "Christian" is used as synonymous with understanding, friendliness, tolerance or kindness which goes beyond what might be expected? We mean that such a person is trying to follow the teachings of Jesus and the religion of Jesus. We do not mean just the ethics of Jesus, which actually set up a pretty difficult standard to follow. We mean that such a person is striving to follow the will of God as Jesus strove to know and to do the will of God.

This is the way in which Unitarians endeavor to be Christians. Of course we know that we fail and fall short of Jesus' teachings and of his religion. But, we apply the test he used, "by their fruits ye shall know them." Unitarians hold that this is the real test and sign of a Christian, and that this test shows whether one "does justly, loves mercy and walks humbly with his God." Some years ago a Unitarian physician wrote a book entitled "What Men Live By". Some of you remember that he said men live by Work, Play, Love and Worship. The years have proven that he was right. There is no substitute for work; we must have recreation; one of the greatest needs of the world is real love and understanding; and worship which lifts man onto a higher plane of thought redeems life and makes it worth while! Dr. Von Ogden Vogt, in his recent book *The Primacy of Worship* warns of the dangers of creeds which divide people. He contrasts this with a concept of worship which is above creeds and rituals, and reminds us that such worship is what all people are seeking, for, as he says: "One thing is the same for all, the meeting of men with the world as a whole, the communion of man with his God."

With such a broad view and such vast purposes Unitarians are impatient with antiquated and limiting creeds which hold men back instead of inspiring them to press onward and upward toward a better world for all.

—Paul Harmon Chapman

Editor's Mail Box

[The Editor welcomes correspondence from readers of *The Unitarian Christian.* Such correspondence as may be of general interest will appear in this column.]

Sir:

As I read about the efforts of the Unitarians and Universalists to merge, I cannot avoid a wry smile, because I feel that the whole Unitarian movement and the closely-related denominations are missing a great opportunity of the age. The verbose discussions by the various clergymen indicate lack of clarity in their own minds of "what to tie to." Formerly, I took much pride in saying that I was simply a Unitarian. Now I must say that I am a Unitarian Christian and add "but not a left-winger" because of their peculiar antics. Here I am an Affiliate-Methodist, although there is a Unitarian church at Annapolis, 17 miles north.

I attribute this great confusion to several deficiencies, growing out of what I have said to others, that there is more hypocrisy, inaccuracy of interpretation, and superficiality in the teaching and preaching of religion than in any other branch of human knowledge, because it is all left to clergymen, who do not represent the highest intellectual class, — no originality of thought — accurately.

It is not wrong to say that Unitarianism grew out of medieval Christianity, even as Arianism was its far earlier counterpart among the Visigoths, and the Waldensians much like it in later years. But the ministers do not know clearly "just what Christianity is"—just what Jesus' mission on earth was. The essence of Christianity can be stated in half a page, as I am doing in my forthcoming book at the end of the section on the Hebrew subrace, where I am presenting brief biographies of Jesus, Peter, and Paul. Once the ministers read it, I imagine they will say "why didn't I think of this before?"

It is regrettable that your periodical magazine does not welcome letters "to the editor" expressing the views of the highly-educated *layman* on such subjects as merging, tenets, etc. I can give you a set of principles that should satisfy anyone. I much dislike that term "Judaeo-Christian heritage" because it shows lack of knowledge about Jesus' background and mission. It is too narrow and partly untrue. Unitarians will gain no enthusiasm about it. It is an improper basis for the proposed merger. My book should appear on the market about May, and I especially commend to your reading the section on the Hebrew subrace.* The book necessarily will be used in historical courses because of its broad scope.

Cordially yours,
Col. C. I. Kephart, Ph.D.
Shady Side, Md.

* Pages 143-161 incl., Semite subrace.

Sir:

I am at present an undergraduate considering the Unitarian ministry and of late I have been completely confounded by the conflicts within our denomination. Dr. Holmer of the University philosophy faculty once remarked that there are two types of philosophy: firstly "popular" philosophy which is exemplified in the phrase "philosophy of life" and consists of specific beliefs, etc.; secondly, "technical" philosophy wherein questions are raised and method is of importance. Somewhat analogously, though not strictly, there are two types of religion; the popular creedal religions which are further distinguished by the supposed relevance of a general answer ("Christ is the answer" etc.) and the individualistic religion which collectively stimulates and gives a methodology for the thought and indirectly to the decisions of the individual—this latter best exemplified in the Unitarian Church-Fellowship and even more in its schools of religion for the young. Thus the Syracusan "confession" seemed to me ill-advised and immature.

In a similar manner the arguments, if so complimentary a term may be used, which Mr. Allen used against "syncretism" in his Editorial in the March, 1960 C. E. issue in one sense do not go far enough and in a second go nowhere and are ill-advised. They do not go far enough insofar as they condemn in other religions what is analogous to what all Unitarians have discarded from their so-called Judeo-Christian heritage.

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Editor's Mail Box

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Paul is little less adamant on the inferiority of women than Mohammed and Christianity has no more of a rational basis than Islam and the Holy Writ has with a few exceptions until recently been as unquestionable as the Koran. Similarly with the other examples, leading logically only to the conclusion that no Unitarian is "practising and teaching" our Christianity (which contains also an ascetic tradition, etc.).

I do not agree with Mr. Allen in regard to the shallowness of popular comparative religion books, which are in a sense as occidocentric as the exclusivists since they caricature the religions in a Procrustean manner, as for example in that oft-printed list of the Golden Rule in all the World Religions. Nonetheless it is fallacious and parochial to say that Christianity represents "an ethic and culture which has resulted in the highest type of civilization which man has ever known—" which is true only when judged according to our Christian prejudices. Thus Mr. Allen in a sense went nowhere since his criteria were misplaced; you do not judge a piece of sculpture by the categories of musical harmony.

In a few closing remarks I would only add that the concept of Judeo-Christian is a word which actually denotes nothing; contrary to Dr. Dawson there is no "reality of Christian culture." A tradition which includes Moses, Amos, Philo, Christ, Paul, Erigena, Acquinas, Calvin, Menno Simmons, and Voltaire denotes little except that elusive something which is not to be grasped, for a conscious heritage is a dead one; while a living tradition is infinitely subtle. In a sense it denotes less of one's belief than even the word "Unitarian" which is at present too tied up with a pious and optimistic enlightenment. The religious individual is in no way delimited by a term as vague as Christian; one must be more specific and Germanic. I can be religiously denoted in abbreviated form by being called a Sumerio-Parseeo - Judeo - Graeco - Pagano - Romano - Christiano - Arabio - Catholico - Germanico - Protestanto - Norgo - Swedo - Americano - Minnesoto - Unitariano - Human. My heritage as Christian is not more decisive than my being a human being and is not divisive in regard to communion with non-Christians who will such. One's heritage does not determine the depth of religious experience (at most it only gives it its character, e.g. only Catholics have visions of the Virgin Mary) which is of more importance in religion as inner experience than one's heritage which is to a certain extent more external. Religion, as a "peace of mind" cult, is concentrating today on heritage-in-general and too little on the individual, that infinitely varied entity who is transformed by and himself forms that which when abstracted is called a heritage.

However, I have digressed enough in explicating my puerile observations and will close this letter which is now too long for publication as such, too disorganized to be refuted by Mr. Allen, and perhaps too much the result of a compulsive expression of mild disgust to be intelligible to aught but myself.

Your fellow Unitarian,
Dallas Ouren
University of Minnesota

Introducing Our Contributors

Mrs. Russell F. Baker is a graduate of St. Lawrence University and Harvard University. She has been a director of Religious Education in a number of churches including those in Cambridge, Haverhill and Waltham, Massachusetts. She is president of the Liberal Religious Education Directors Association.

Victor H. Carpenter, Jr. is a graduate of Boston University and the Harvard Divinity School. He is minister of the First Parish Church in Norwell, Massachusetts.

Robert W. Haney is director of Religious Education at the First Church in Boston where he was ordained last year. A graduate student at Harvard, he is author of a book dealing with the problem of censorship to be published this year by Beacon Press.

Albert Camus

(*Continued from page* 6)

ing "illusion" to a place of importance. Instead, Camus uses the priest to show how love and mercy for the victims of the world are realities about which men can be clear and in which they can be faithful to the human good. According to Camus, we can only be clear (as the sun is clear) about these realities when all the illusions have been shattered and all the baseless hopes by which we would obscure and hide from the fact of death have died.

Deification of Man is Grand Illusion Of Our Time

As one might assume from the foregoing, Camus bitterly attacks the "horizontal religions of our time". He violently denounces the attempted deification of man that has plagued contemporary life. The metaphysical humanist might do well to study Camus' major essay *The Rebel* in which the author pursues the moral pretensions of the French Revolutionaries, the pedantry and hypocrisy of the bourgeois world, the demonia of the Fascists and the messianic utopianism of the Marxists. In each of these movements, argues Camus, man overreaches himself, becomes the victim of his illusions and pretends to be one sort of God or another. On the basis of his illusions and his aspirations toward godhood, man justifies the atrocities which he commits against his fellows.

The theme which he elaborates philosophically in *The Rebel* is fictionally presented in his short story "The Renegade" (one of the six short stories appearing under the title *Exile and the Kingdom*). "The Renegade" concerns a priest who is tormented by his own need to impose himself upon the world by means of martyrdom. With martyrdom his motive, the priest journeys into the African desert, ostensibly to convert a notoriously savage tribe of Bedouins. But the priest abandons the God in whose name he seeks martyrdom—the God who (according to Camus) "never strikes or kills". The priest is taken captive by the tribe and because his new masters beat and mutilate him in the name of their monstrous, blind fetish, he accepts their law of hatred and violence with masochistic fervor. The story ends with the renegade priest waiting to assassinate the priest who will follow him in his original intention of converting the tribe.

The central character of the story (very much akin to the "heroes" of Camus' two major novels, *The Fall* and *The Stranger*) is a victim of a terrible "fall". A "fall" from humanity to subhumanity. The source of his disaster is the same desire that prompted Prometheus of Greek mythology—the desire to be equal to the gods. Man, according to Camus, is victimized by his illusions to power and by the institutions which foster those illusions in order to gain control over him. The illusion is the "blind fetish" which usurps man's creative desire to "give himself" in devotion to something beyond himself. Man can give himself to nothing more noble than his own creativity in the face of absurdity and death. His courage and intellectual integrity in the face of chaos and his eventual destruction, these alone ennoble his creativeness. Man's hope for himself is expressed in the figure of Father Paneloux, the priest of Oran, who turns from judging in the name (and thus in the "illusion") of God to loving and caring and thereby restoring his humanity.

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Editorial

(*Continued from page* 2)

opinions without having an enduring principle which will turn the heap into an organism.

If we should have a church made up of Shintoists, God-deniers, God-affirmers, dervishes, Schopenhauerian advocates of suicide, free-lovers, practical moralists, and theoretical immoralists—none of them subordinating its sanity or insanity to some dominant idea of systematic unity—we should not have a church; we should have something in the nature of a hash cooked by a lunatic chef. And if such a church was ever set going, it would be demolished by one vast explosion of the laughter of mankind. "Differing statements of faith," therefore, may not enrich but on the contrary destroy. What a liberal church has to do, then, is to see not only the variations but also the center about which the variations cluster and from which they draw their life. Then there is enrichment, otherwise there is spiritual and intellectual and probably psychic disorder. The Preamble sees no such center and this, I fear, is in the highest degree unfortunate. For without a dominant idea binding the varieties and mutations into an organic form, liberalism, like all other hybrids, will have no off-spring; it will continue in its present intellectual prostration and will substitute mediocre expediency for stately thoughts and profound experience . . . ."

If we are to have consolidation let us have it with as little delay and expense in money and effort as is possible. But let us insist that now or within the interim year there be prepared a statement of purpose authentic to the heritage and traditions of both Churches, with gracefulness of expression and possessed of spiritual utturance able to inspire and elevate laity and clergy in both denominations. Then we can go forward together ready to take up the tasks that call for high resolve and a faith strong enough to produce a radical Christianity for the accomplishing of God's purposes in these days.

C. C. F.

THEODORE PARKER 1810 - 1860

O Thou our God, we pray thee that we may be strengthened for every day's duty, have patience to bear any cross that is laid upon us, wisdom to order our pathway aright, the heart of holiness to trust thee with an absolute faith, and the soul that is full of loving-kindness to do good to our brothers here on the earth. So may thy kingdom come, and thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

From a prayer of Theodore Parker,
July 18, 1852

. . . Christianity is not only the absolute religion; it has also the ideal-man. In Jesus of Nazareth it gives us, in a certain sense, the model of religious excellence. It is a great thing to have the perfect idea of religion; to have also that idea made real, satisfactory to the wants of any age, were a yet further greatness. A Christian church should aim to have its members Christian as Jesus was the Christ; sons of man as he was; sons of God as much as he. To be that it is not needful to observe all the forms he complied with, only such forms as help you; not needful to have all the thoughts that he had, only such thoughts as are true . . . Jesus came not to fetter men, but to free them.

from "The True Idea of a
Christian Church" 1846

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LOOK OUT AND UP

By The Rev. Dr. Dana McLean Greeley,
President, American Unitarian Association
(From the "Boston Herald", April 16, 1960)

Many people talk about the tragedy that is associated with Good Friday, and they think of it as the darkest day on the Christian calendar. They think of the pathos and the suffering of the Master from the time that he was betrayed in Gethsemane to the time when he said, "It has ended, Father, unto thy hands I commit my spirit." Never before had a prophet of such insight and power and promise gone about preaching and doing good among the children of men, and not since then has there been one who could equal Him in stature, or in whom the spirit of God has found such full expression.

We say that many people talk about the tragedy that is associated with Good Friday. But it is faithfulness to an ideal that we would stress, and that is victorious living.

Jesus believed in a kingdom not of this world, and his attachment was to that kingdom. And his courage in its behalf is what gives us justification for rejoicing even in the darkest hour. If it was night then, his spirit was as a morning star, the brightest that ever foretold the coming of the dawn. As we review the creation and as we reckon history, God had not achieved before, and has not achieved since, anything as wonderful as his loyalty to truth as he understood it, and to that kingdom not of this world. In the life that he lived and the death that he died he revealed the calibre of a man and the destiny of the race.

The adversities of this world always seem like tragedies, but in themselves they are not tragedies. The tragedy occurs only when we succumb to those adversities. If like Jesus we can rise above them, we can know the peace that passeth understanding.

This Lenten message was presented by the Massachusetts and Boston Councils of Churches.